

Message Text

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ACTION HA-02

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0587

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 25820

LIMDIS

EO 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS:SREF

SUBJ: CURRENT STATUS OF RTG THINKING ON REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROBLEM

1. DCM MET WITH NSC SECRETARY GENERAL SITTHI ON SEPTEMBER 1 TO REVIEW PRIVATELY CURRENT RTG THINKING ON REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT POLICY, AS WELL AS POSSIBLE PROJECTS UNDER THE VICE PRESIDENT'S TWO MILLION DOLLAR PROPOSAL.

2. OVERALL, SITTHI SAID THAT THERE IS A CONSENSUS WITHIN THE RTG THAT RESETTLEMENT OF A GOOD NUMBER OF REFUGEES IS INEVITABLE, AND THE RTG AGENCIES ARE WORKING ON A LONG-TERM APPROACH. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES ON SUCH QUESTIONS AS TIMING, MODALITIES AND NUMBERS. SITTHI SAID THAT THE MOI REMAINS THE MOST NEGATIVE ESSENTIALLY HOLDING TO TRADITIONAL POSITION THAT ONLY A RELATIVELY SMALL NUMBER (ABOUT 20,000) CAN BE ABSORBED AND THEN ONLY IF MOST OF THE OTHERS HAVE ALREADY LEFT THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, SITTHI SAID THE PM HAS DECIDED THAT THE RTG MUST SERIOUSLY DETERMINE HOW TO APPROACH THE RESETTLEMENT QUESTION. THE NSC AND OTHERS BELIEVE IT IS NOW TIME TO MOVE AHEAD, HOWEVER, CAREFULLY

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AND QUIETLY.

3. SITTHI SAID THAT THERE DOES REMAIN CONCERN ABOUT MOVING TOO PUBLICLY OR TOO QUICKLY ON RESETTLEMENT BECAUSE OF DOMESTIC, POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. THE INSURGENCY PROBLEM HAS ALSO GIVEN SOME PAUSE TO NSC EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY POSSIBLE AREAS FOR RESETTLEMENT OR,

AS THE RTG PREFERS TO CALL IT, "RELOCATION". FOR EXAMPLE, SITTHI SAID THAT ONE PROVINCIAL AREA WHICH HAD BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR POSSIBLE "RELOCATION" NOW HAS AN INSURGENCY PROBLEM AND HAD TO BE DROPPED AS A POSSIBLE SITE. FURTHER, THE RTG AGENCIES ARE NOT SURE WHETHER THE BEST COURSE IS TO MOVE TOWARDS "RELOCATION"(MEANING RESETTLEMENT OF SOME REFUGEE GROUPS IN IDENTIFIABLE COMMUNITIES OF THEIR OWN) OR "DISPERSAL", (I.E., INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES INTO BROADER THAI RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES). SITTHI SAID HE AND THE NSC STAFF HAVE FOCUSED ON A FIGURE OF 50,000 TO BE RESETTLED, BUT AS NOTED ABOVE, MOI POSITION IS MUCH LOWER.

4. DESPITE MOI'S NEGATIVE ATTITUDE, SITTHI SAID THAT, THROUGH HIS OWN PERSONAL EFFORTS, HE HAS SECURED GENERAL AGREEMENT TO DEVELOP TWO SPECIFIC PROJECTS USING THE TWO MILLION DOLLARS OFFERED BY THE VICE PRESIDENT. ACCORDING TO SITTHI, BOTH INVOLVE A "SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF REFUGEES", WITH ONE DESIGNED TO PUT A GROUP OF REFUGEES IN A "RELOCATION ENVIRONMENT", AND THE OTHER DIRECTED TOWARDS "DISPERSAL" WITHIN THAI POPULATION. DESPITE INTENSE RTG CONCERN ABOUT PUBLIC MOVES TOWARDS RESETTLEMENT, SITTHI SAID THAT THE RTG WOULD PROBABLY BE PREPARED TO MOVE AHEAD WITH THESE TWO PILOT PROJECTS IN A LOW KEY UNPUBLICIZED FASHION. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT MOI, WHILE AGREEING IN PRINCIPLE, REMAINS RELUCTANT TO GIVE FINAL

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APPROVAL FOR FEAR THAT THE USG WOULD USE RTG ACCEPTANCE OF FUNDS AS A LEVER TO FORCE A RTG COMMITMENT TO WIDE-SCALE RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES. SITTHI SAID THAT HE HAD REVIEWED THE RECORD ON THE VICE PRESIDENT'S OFFER AND HAS EXPLAINED TO MOI THAT THE PURPOSE OF OUR PROPOSAL WAS TO ENCOURAGE FEASIBILITY STUDIES OR PILOT PROJECTS TO TEST VARIOUS APPROACHES TO RESETTLEMENT. HE HAS TOLD MOI THAT IN HIS VIEW ACCEPTANCE OF FUNDS FROM USG AS PROPOSED BY VICE PRESIDENT WOULD NOT MEAN THE RTG WAS COMMITTED TO A LARGE-SCALE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM.

5. SITTHI SAID THAT HE HAS COME UNDER HEAVY FIRE FROM MOI ON THIS POINT AND WOULD APPRECIATE SOME FORM OF CLARIFICATION FROM US. HE SUGGESTED THAT WE CONSIDER FORWARDING A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF OUR PROPOSAL OUTLINED IN SUCH A MANNER THAT IT DOES NOT CARRY WITH IT A CONNOTATION THAT USG WOULD VIEW ACCEPTANCE OF OFFER AS A COMMITMENT BY THE RTG TO EMBARK ON FOLLOW-ON MAJOR RESETTLEMENT PROJECTS. SITTHI SAID THAT ANY WRITTEN STATEMENT NEED NOT BE A FORMAL DISCLAIMER BUT COULD SIMPLY BE WRITTEN TO DESCRIBE THE PROPOSAL POSITIVELY IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THE VICE PRESIDENT DID, WITH

WHATEVER APPROPRIATE ELABORATION WE COULD MAKE. DCM
POINTED OUT TO SITTHI THAT OBVIOUSLY WE COULD NOT GIVE
APPROVAL IN ADVANCE TO PROJECTS WHICH WE HAD NOT
REVIEWED TO ASSURE THEY CONFORM WITH MUTUALLY AGREED
OBJECTIVES. SITTHI SAID THAT WAS FULLY UNDERSTOOD. ALL
HE NEEDED WAS SOME WRITTEN DESCRIPTION OF OUR PROPOSAL
WHICH WOULD ALLOW HIM TO NOTE THAT IT DID NOT CONTAIN

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ANY CONDITIONS WITH REGARD TO FINAL RTG DECISIONS ON
RESETTLEMENT POLICY.

6. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, SITTHI IS PROBABLY THE
MOST SYMPATHETIC SENIOR RTG OFFICER ON THE REFUGEE
QUESTION. WHILE THE MOI ATTITUDE WILL REMAIN A
CONTINUING PROBLEM, WE BELIEVE IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE
TAKE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO ENCOURAGE THE RTG TO MOVE
AHEAD ON SOME FIRST STEPS TOWARDS RESETTLEMENT OF
REFUGEES. CONSEQUENTLY, WE WILL BE RECOMMENDING TO
DEPARTMENT IN SEPTEL A LETTER FROM THE AMBASSADOR TO THE
PRIME MINISTER WHICH MEETS SITTHI'S NEEDS WHILE PRE-
SERVING OUR NEED TO REVIEW IN DETAIL ANY SPECIFIC THAI
PROPOSALS BEFORE GIVING AGREEMENT. ABRAMOWITZ

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